

“Russia’s Security Concerns”



EXAMINATION of Russia’s ‘security concerns’ have begun to exercise a lot of people I know. Not just those on the ersatz left, but some good people too. This extends from communists and socialists, and even includes some of the libertarians over at Spiked Online. Recognition that Russia has legitimate ‘security concerns’ is not primarily about finding reasons to apologise for Vladimir Putin, but is all about attacking NATO which is the default posture of many people broadly on the left.

Recently, the *Morning Star* accused Labour leader, Keir Starmer, of having “a tin ear” for rejecting the idea that there is any equivalence between Russia and NATO. Meanwhile the placard presses of the Socialist Workers Party have been rolling out the accusation that the West is responsible for the escalation of the crisis. This is in line with the Stop the War Coalition, where all the usual suspects are lining up to stress NATO’s responsibility for the war launched by Vladimir Putin. Apparently, NATO’s

actions in strengthening the armed forces of Poland and the Baltic states, and helping to arm the forces of independent Ukraine, is seen as unforgiveable and as reprehensible as the bombing of civilians in Kyiv and Kharkiv. These elements, of the left, peace lovers all, led by Lindsey German, Tariq Ali, Kate Hudson, and Jeremy Corbyn, have truly gone down the rabbit hole.

In my last column I wrote at length about the West's criminal folly and grotesque failures, so I won't repeat myself here. Instead, I want to look at the modern history of Russia's security.

Since 1922, the year the Soviet Union was founded, Russia was not attacked by a Western democracy. For one hundred years there has never been a violation of Russia's borders apart from that launched by Adolf Hitler, and his allies, in 1941. This was preceded by Stalin's alliance with the Third Reich for 22 months, during which the Red Army invaded and annexed half of Poland, together with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. At the same time, 1939-1940, Russia invaded Finland, with the object of annexing substantial parts of that country.

Of course, all these territories had belonged to the Tsarist Empire ruled over by the autocrat, Nicholas II until February 1917. They all had slightly different statuses within the Empire. Finland, for example, was a self-governing Grand Duchy. In wars of bewildering complexity involving Polish, German, Bolshevik, and Baltic armies, in the midst of the Russian Revolution, all these territories made for the exit, declaring their independence from Russia and her rulers.

The Bolsheviks, who'd seized power in St Petersburg and Moscow at the end of 1917, were not happy about this and fought tooth and nail to keep hold of all three Baltic States, together with Ukraine and most of Poland. Lenin and Trotsky sustained a war of attrition against the forces of Symon Petliura (delegate of the revolutionary All-Ukrainian Congress of Soldier Deputies in Kyiv), who'd been elected head of the Ukrainian General Military Committee. Subsequently, Petliura led the Ukrainian People's

Republic. However, the Bolsheviks defeated Petliura and overran Ukraine, but failed to defeat the Poles. By 1921 they the Commissars in Moscow were forced to recognise the independence of Poland and the Baltic States.

Stalin's reversal of this situation during his alliance with the Third Reich 1939-1941 subjected the entire region to Soviet rule, which was rapidly overthrown in 1941 during Hitler's war against Russia, but was restored by the Red Army during the retreat of the Wehrmacht in 1944.

At no time has Russia been attacked or invaded by Western democracies. On the other hand, Russia has over the last century invaded and annexed all of its near neighbours, including slices of Romania. This is why NATO was established in 1949 to contain the Soviet dictatorship, which had not only seized the historic possessions of the Tsars along the Baltic coast, and seized vast tracts of Finland, but extended its rule to Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia.

Thirty-odd years ago, 1989-91, with the collapse of the Soviet Union all these states unsurprisingly hurried to join NATO to protect themselves from Russian incursions. Belarus has remained as a post-Soviet *twilight zone* in which the dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, has kept the country firmly within Moscow's orbit. The attempt to do something similar in Ukraine decisively failed in 2013-2014 when the popularity of Kyiv's pivot to the West was confirmed by mass demonstrations, and large majorities cast in democratic elections.

It was this that prompted the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea and the establishment of pro-Russian enclaves in Luhansk and Donetsk. Vladimir Putin has wrapped himself in the mantle of Great Russian Chauvinism in order to rehearse and relive a version of Russian history he finds congenial. He is now a latter-day Autocrat of All the Russias, complete with the *dictator chic* of very long tables and vast marble halls where he is kept at least 20 meters

apart from his ministers in order to emphasise the untouchable majesty of his person.

It is tempting to imagine that Vladimir is as mad as a box of frogs, but I don't think so. What Putin fears above all else is losing control of the Kremlin and the Russian lands. He fears the threat of the European Union as much as NATO, because he fears the effect of open bourgeois democracies on his frontiers. The appeal of open democratic capitalist societies amongst working people has not been properly processed by most of the left. The fall of the Polish dictatorship in 1990 to the intransigence of working-class militancy, ably assisted by Roman Catholic priests, has still not been processed by many leftists, any more than they have come to grips with the fact that the 'fall of communism' was welcomed by millions in Russia and Eastern Europe.

It is this spread of bourgeois democracy that Vladimir Putin and his clique of billionaires fears more than anything else. He knows that if open democracies and relatively prosperous economies take root along his western borders then the days of his autocracy and Belarus's *twilight zone* will be numbered. Popular revolt will, in the fulness of time, become unstoppable as working people living under post-Soviet stagnation and unfreedom refuse to take any more of Putin and Lukashenko's self-serving nonsense.

NATO presents no aggressive military threat to Moscow whatever. Russia's real 'security concerns' are entirely political and economic.

The Kremlin cabal is threatened by the relative prosperity on offer by a pivot to the West. Deindustrialisation, global competition, and the gargantuan appetites of Western corporations for super-profits, notwithstanding. Working people in Ukraine voted overwhelmingly for independence and in vast majorities for a step away from Moscow towards the West. They know which side their bread is buttered.

As unpalatable as this reality is to all of us on the

left: the socialists, anarchists, communists, and Marxist groupuscules, this is the bitter truth. The bourgeois democratic promise is more appealing than anything we have to offer. Putin knows this, and his resort to military solutions in Georgia, 2001-2008, and Ukraine, 2014-2022, follows the time-honoured response of Tsars and Bolsheviks to the unruliness of the peoples over whom they seek to rule.

As the post-pandemic crisis intensifies, with rising prices, sky-high electricity and gas bills, the benefit-dependent-poor, here in Britain, are being driven further into desperate straits. So, the idea that capitalism could be appealing is counter-intuitive; it sounds positively barmy. However, it is abundantly clear that the great mass of working people in Britain, and beyond, are not prepared to exchange the rigours of life in democratic commercial societies for the siren call of the dictators in Moscow or Beijing. Dictatorship has no appeal amongst the masses, and this aversion has been intensified by the bloody violence and repression unleashed by Putin upon Ukraine.

Russia has no legitimate security concerns beyond its frontiers. All the existential threats to Putin are to be found inside Russia. The uncertain and intrinsically unreliable relationship between the majority of working people across Russia, and the gang of multi-millionaires in the Kremlin, represent the gravest threat to the dictatorship.

Russia has invariably been a hostile and aggressive neighbour, and only the end of dictatorship in Moscow will reassure the independent states along its borders. This is not something that NATO can bring about. Only the working people of Russia can do this, ably prompted by the armed resistance of the Ukrainian working class – Putin's real and only 'security concern' is the security of his hold on the Russian state and people, if that begins to slip, then he and Lukashenko are finished regardless of the horrors they decide to impose upon Ukraine.